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ABSTRACT

The intent of this paper is to examine dual language instruction by describing a 50-50 language immersion program operating at Leigh Elementary School in Phoenix, Arizona. Specifically examined are the challenges encountered as school personnel worked to provide language minority students with greater opportunities to learn in six dual language classroom settings. The paper is divided into three parts: methodology, findings, and feedback. Individuals that favor dual language programs contend that because dual language practice relies upon a reciprocal approach, dual language students acquire dual language proficiency without the need for teachers to translate from one language to another. This result depends on instructional, resource, and student symmetry. In practice, however, asymmetry was found in all three areas. Instructional code switching asymmetry was found in effect with advantaged native English-speaking students. English teachers were monolingual, while Spanish speaking teachers were bilingual. There was a tendency for Spanish-speaking teachers to clarify their instructions in English for native English-speaking students (code switch) as needed, while such translation (code switching) was not available to native Spanish-speaking children. Furthermore, contrary to program guidelines, the acquisition of English was given priority over the acquisition of Spanish. Spanish language resources were generally of inferior quality and quantity to English language resources, and the school was never able to attain a stable 50-50 ratio of native English- and Spanish-speaking students. A literature review and bibliography are included. (KFT)

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Dual Language Asymmetry:

Symbolic Inequalities

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Abstract

The extent to which dual-language programs deliver benefits to students with different primary and secondary language skills continues to be debated and researched. Individuals that favor dual language programs contend that because dual language practice relies upon a reciprocal approach, dual language students acquire dual language proficiency without the need for teachers to translate from one language to another. By conserving and utilizing the language skills that students bring, dual language students have increased opportunities to gain cross-cultural understandings and to realize academic success in the future. In addition, dual immersion programs exist in order to enable all students to achieve bilingualism regardless of the students' native tongue. Research that explores whether dual language programs meet the needs of the monolingual or bilingual student, however, is still limited.

The intent of this paper is not to criticize dual language instruction. Instead, it is to describe a 50-50 dual language immersion program that exists and operates in Phoenix, Arizona. In particular, it was the researcher's intent to examine the implementation of a dual language program at Leigh Elementary School and the challenges encountered as school personnel worked to provide language minority students with greater opportunities to learn.

Introduction

While the efficacy of language programs remains a widely debated topic in educational discourse and state and local policy, researchers and program developers agree that language programs serve dissimilar students differently as they do not exist within a vacuum. As such, researchers and program developers agree that the success of language programs must be analyzed on a case-by-case basis in that the success of each language program is largely affected by the context in which the language program is implemented. Language program researchers must take into consideration the micro-level and macro-level issues in language program planning and must come to understand how the sociopolitical context may favor or impede language programs entirely (Freeman, 1996). The intent of this paper is to investigate a recently developed language program in its context. In particular, this paper examines the implementation of a dual language program at Leigh Elementary School and the challenges encountered as school personnel struggled to provide language minority students with greater opportunities to learn.

Demographics

Leigh Elementary School District experienced enormous and rapid changes in its demographic makeup over the past several years. From 1990 to 1997, there was an 83% growth in total enrollment, a 77% growth in students classified as having a low socioeconomic status, a 132% growth in the population of ethnic minorities, and a 203% growth in Limited English Proficient students. These changes were accompanied by low student test scores and by calls for school officials to develop an improved program for educating second language students.

According to district reports, Leigh Elementary is the most diverse of the Leigh district's elementary schools. At the time of this study, Leigh Elementary's population was composed of 12% ethnic majority and 88% ethnic minority students. Of the 88% ethnic minorities, 81% were Mexican-American, 4.9% were African-American, 2.5% were Native-American, and .3% was Asian-American. Leigh's population was socio-economically homogeneous. Almost 97% of the population participated in the free and reduced lunch program. Leigh's population was also linguistically dichotomous. Spanish and English were the dominant languages at home and few students were bilingual upon admittance to Leigh.

In 1996 Leigh Elementary was awarded a Title VII Grant that funded a language program entitled the "Two-Way Bilingual Immersion Literacy in Two Languages" program. The objective of this and other dual language immersion programs was to facilitate English acquisition while maintaining and furthering the native language skills of students.

The Leigh Dual Language Program was developed to promote bilingualism for Leigh elementary students, regardless of language proficiency status. By this, the program was developed to enhance access to educational opportunities for all Leigh students by providing increased opportunities for students from diverse language backgrounds to learn two languages. This program focused on dual language immersion with the languages of focus being Spanish and English, the representative languages of the school's population. The 1996-1997 school year was the year of planning. As such, this program was still in its puerile stage at the time of this study having just completed its second year of implementation.

Leigh's dual language program was viewed as a success by many, but little external research had been conducted to assess this program's nature. Because this program was in its infancy, this provided an excellent opportunity for an investigation into how it operated within its sociopolitical context, and how it is addressed the call to provide equal access and equal opportunities to learn.

Part one of this paper provides a description of the methodological and analytical approaches I took to investigate Leigh's dual language immersion program. This section also presents the theoretical framework I developed to analyze the data and to generate my assertions. In conjunction with this program's underlying objective to enhance access to equal educational opportunity, I found asymmetry to be a useful tool to study the concept of equality in detail. Part two of this paper provides a glimpse of what occurred in this program and how these particular events related to larger contextual issues. Part three provides formative feedback to Leigh itself and essential information to other schools implementing language programs as assertions and conclusions in this paper may have implications for the success experienced by other school personnel that are intending on implementing dual language reforms.

Data Collection

Document Collection

I was given a notebook of statistical and demographic information about Leigh and Leigh's community. Included in this folder were test scores, the school calendar, publications written in two languages used to recruit parents and students into the program, and other school publications regarding the program. I also collected data that was made available to the public throughout Leigh's campus.

Observations

My observations were conducted as a complete observer. I did not participate in the activities of the classroom whatsoever. My observable sample was deliberately chosen as I observed each participating classroom. This included six different classrooms: two classrooms per kindergarten, two classrooms per the 1st grade, and two classrooms per the 2nd grade. Although the program operated through the 3rd grade, I did not observe these classroom settings.

Interviews

I conducted two formal interviews with the program director. The first was introductory. My findings from this interview almost entirely dealt with programmatic issues, guidelines, operations, and objectives. My second interview with the program director was held with a different intent. This interview came at a strategic time in my research. My main goal was to check my observations against the director's perceptions of the program. Although we did discuss some programmatic issues, this interview delved more into theoretical issues regarding my working hypotheses. This interview also served as one of two participant checks.

I conducted one informal interview with a board member and many other informal interviews with the teachers. These informal interviews occurred between class periods, on walks to the cafeteria, and sometimes, although I tried to avoid this practice, during instructional time.

Data Analysis

According to Erickson (1986), "one basic task of data analysis is to generate these assertions, largely through induction" (p. 146). I searched the entire data corpus, read

and re-read these data sources and looked for underling themes. Following Erickson's (1986) procedures of data analysis, the "data resources [were] converted into items of data" (p. 149). I revisited the corpus and color-coded (p. 149) the data in relation to my working assertions. From this, I fragmented the pieces that supported each assertion together and triangulated the information to further develop and examine relevant themes.

Through data analysis, I was especially sensitive to the "discrepancies between the ideal plan and its implementation" (Freeman, 1996, p. 563). One of the fundamental principles of dual language/bilingual immersion programs relates to insuring equal access to educational opportunity. In reference to bilingualism and bi-literacy, "the explicit goal is for all of the students to master skills in both Spanish and English through equal representation and evaluation of Spanish and English" (Freeman, 1996, p. 579). Equal attention and respect are to be given to the two languages most prevalent to the community's population, Spanish and English, in order to promote equal involvement in the two languages, and to lead to systemic reforms with implications for all Leigh students. Prior to introducing my findings, a description of the theoretical framework developed to conduct this study is given.

Theoretical Framework

It may be argued that symmetry is one of nature's wonders. In almost every shred of nature there exists some kind of underlying order. In fractals, repeated iterations of basic yet random shapes create symmetrical beauty. The simplest thread of a leaf can be reiterated millions of times to create a poised tree or the simplest geometric shape can be reiterated thousands of times to create a flower whose whorls are equalized. Each small portion of the shape, when magnified, can reproduce exactly a larger portion. "Fractals,

in stressing qualitative measurement, remind us of the lessons of wholeness," lessons of order, and lessons of balance (Wheatley, 1992, p. 129).

It may also be argued that asymmetry, defined as a lack of proportion, also occurs but is atypical. As such, imbalances or inequalities may be antagonistic and may impede what is essential to complete development and balance. Asymmetry in this paper describes the tool used to study the dual language program at Leigh.

Instances of symmetry were noticed when the program promoted fairness and equality. For example, this program ensured that all school publications were printed in both Spanish and English. Ideally, this pattern was to be carried across this program to ensure an equal representation of both languages. The logistics developed in the planning period promoted this principle of equality completely. Instances of asymmetry occurred, however, when the planners attempted to move theory to practice.

While planners and teachers of this program proposed to promote balance, fairness, and equality, asymmetries were widely observed in and across the participating classrooms. As such, the intent of the researcher in this paper is to make these asymmetries apparent in order to help rebalance the scale and to provide other individuals equal and enhanced opportunities to learn.

The following accounts of asymmetry have been organized into three categories: instructional asymmetry describes imbalances in teaching practices; resource asymmetry describes a disproportion of resources provided for student learning; and student asymmetry describes ways in which a lack of correspondence occurred among students' in regards to their interpersonal relationships.

Assertions on Asymmetry

Instructional Asymmetry

The Spanish teachers were bilingual and the English teachers were monolingual. As such, the teachers were classified as either Spanish speakers or English speakers, and the classrooms were classified as being places where either Spanish or English was used as the sole language of instruction. "The ideal plan [was] for the English-dominant teacher to speak and be spoken to only in English and for the Spanish-dominant teacher to speak and be spoken to only in Spanish" (Freeman, 1996, p. 576). This required that the classroom teacher did not translate. The teachers were to "be true" to their respective language and their language of instruction. In this sense, students could identify teachers with one particular language and one language with a specific classroom setting. Through this organizational format, the students would ideally be ensured equal exposure to both languages and opportunities for language and cognitive development.

Instructional asymmetry resulted when the teachers switched language codes. Again, all of the English-speaking teachers were monolingual and the Spanish-speaking teachers were bilingual. As such, the Spanish-speaking teachers were able to switch language codes when they had a greater tendency of not being "true" to the instructional language because they were bilingual. For example, if a student did not comprehend what the Spanish-speaking teacher was saying, it was easy for the teacher to translate her message into English in order to reduce the student's confusion. None of the English-dominant teachers were "able to speak Spanish, making teacher code-switching impossible" (Freeman, 1996, p. 576). Due to the fact that the English-speaking teachers were monolingual, the Spanish-speaking children were forced to comprehend English

while the English-speaking children could rely on the Spanish-speaking teachers' capacity to translate.

Instructional asymmetry also resulted when teachers treated students unequally in communications. Invariably, when an English-speaking student posed a question to the Spanish-speaking teacher, the student would ask the question in English. Since the teacher was bilingual, the teacher could understand the question in English and could then respond to the question in Spanish. However, when the Spanish-speaking student posed a question in Spanish, the English-speaking teacher could not understand and, therefore, would force the student to ask the question in English. In this, the Spanish-speaking students were being required to both speak and comprehend English while the English-speaking students were only required to listen to the Spanish. The Spanish-speaking teachers did not force the language while the monolingual English-speaking teachers had to force the language because they were monolingual. In this regard, the shortage of bilingual teachers not only resulted in the students experiencing unequal opportunities to learn, but the monolingual English speakers were provided with fewer opportunities to master a second language and the monolingual Spanish speakers were forced into learning the second language.

One out of the three bilingual teachers would not translate and acted as if she did not understand English. She would deflect questions back onto the English-speaking students requiring them to tap into a language broker or try to understand Spanish on their own. This teacher performed in accordance with the programmatic guidelines, and was able to satisfy the dual immersion ideals related to furthering access.

These examples of instructional asymmetry were largely due to the newness of the program and to the shortage of bilingual teachers. Although the program guidelines stated that only one language was to be used to ensure full immersion, the data suggested it was especially difficult for the Spanish-speaking teachers to withhold instruction and other types of support when they were fluent in two languages. They were compelled to help students experiencing frustration to learn. The program's director noted that the teachers were increasingly becoming more accustomed to staying in, or being true to, the target language and not translating, but as with any new program, these things would take a concerted effort and time.

Finally, the primary language of the teacher and the teacher's perceptions about dual language learning may have affected this program's capacity to provide equal access. For example, while observing an English-speaking teacher teach her mixed language science class, she approached me at the back of the room where we talked. She said that she had been an ESL teacher up until the present year. I asked her how she liked the program. She replied that she had never seen kids at this grade level learn "English" faster. From a discourse analysis perspective, her response spoke directly to her perceptions regarding dual-language instruction. Her statement implied that English was her priority. Her objective as a teacher in this program, in other words, may have been to emphasize English acquisition over Spanish acquisition, while not promoting the two languages equally. According to Cummins (1986), reforms are dependent on the extent to which educators redefine their roles with respect to the minority (p. 19). In this case, the teacher's preference for English may have likely influenced how the students judged themselves, their native tongue, and their perceived need to acquire a second language.

This last observation suggests that the success of both the students and program were probably related to the importance that educators attributed to language acquisition and to how students learned. Success may have also been connected to each teacher's strength, training, and personal ideology. "Educators who [saw] their role as adding a second language and cultural affiliation to their students' repertoire [were] likely to empower students more than those who [saw] their role as replacing or subtracting students' primary language and culture" (Cummins, 1986, p. 25).

Resource Asymmetry

Classroom resources describe children's literature books, resource manuals, manipulatives at learning stations, posters and other classroom décor and games. According to the program's guidelines, a Spanish-speaking teacher should only have had Spanish resources within the classroom, and the English-speaking teacher should only have had English resources within the classroom. The teacher's classroom environment was arranged at each teacher's discretion; likewise, the teachers were encouraged to decorate using the appropriate language of the room.

In this instance, an asymmetry occurred as the Spanish teachers had Spanish and bilingual resources, and the English teachers had English resources only. Students in the Spanish-speaking classrooms could access resources in both English and Spanish while students in the English-speaking classrooms could only access resources written in English. The opportunity to learn or read in Spanish was considerably less than the opportunity to learn or read in English.

The library and the resource room demonstrated a similar pattern. The materials written in Spanish that were available in the library were in an isolated section of the

shelves and constituted less than 20% of the total shelving area; thus, the likelihood or tendency to retrieve a book written in English was five times as likely as retrieving a book written in Spanish. The resource room suffered from a similar lack of proportion. Most everything in the room, at least the materials that were not checked out, were written in English.

Analyses of the data collected indicated that the classroom environment as designed by the teacher was also out of balance. The posters in the Spanish-speaking classrooms were, for the most part, bilingual while posters in the English-speaking classrooms were written in English only. The bilingual posters in the Spanish-speaking rooms translated from English to Spanish and back and may have been instructionally useful as such. In the English-speaking classrooms however, English was the only language apparent in the environment.

The imbalance in classroom resources may also have had disparate implications. Access to resources was not balanced. This suggests that the pool of available resources may have been geared toward the English-speaking students. This lack of proportion may have also reflected the newness of this program. More likely, however, was that this disproportion illustrated a larger societal issue.

Student Asymmetry

According to Freeman (1996), the participation of language minority students in dual language is needed to operate a 50-50 model. Freeman notes that, "Language majority students' participation in the dual-language program facilitates the development of academic competence in Spanish" (p. 571). In other words, equal numbers of English-speaking and Spanish-speaking students are needed in order for a 50-50 model of dual

language immersion to operate effectively. Equal numbers of students are needed for student interactions in order to provide balance and to be readily available as peer resources. Students are key in dual language learning.

The fact that the population of Leigh was not balanced statistically introduced a challenge. Leigh suffered from a high attrition rate, and a fast rate of student mobility kept the program numbers in constant flux. Leigh's population to begin with was lopsided. The program director noted that "population percentages ranged from 54%:46% to 70%:30% (Spanish:English)." Class sizes were usually weighted heavily on the Spanish-speaking side because the program lacked English speakers to complete the 50-50 balance.

Observations of the students' classroom experiences also suggested that language separation occurred widely among students. Although the program director stated "our kids play together, our kids recess together, our kids do learning together, and that's got to impact how they think about the others... everyone is mixing with everybody in the program," this is not what I observed. According to the data, students separated themselves into language cliques during formal and informal instruction, free class time, and outside of the classroom. Although some of the classrooms were deliberately arranged by the classroom teacher in order to integrate language speakers and to prevent in-class separation, language cliques occurred when students were allowed to make choices regarding peer interactions. For example, if students were allowed to seat themselves within the classroom at random or were allowed to form their own groups for group work, the students would break off into homogeneous groups. This segregation usually resulted in students associating with students who shared a common language.

Furthermore, divisions in the students' social interactions "correspond[ed] to racial, ethnic, or class lines in society" (Freeman, 1996, p. 579).

Finally, students, also known as the language brokers, were expected to facilitate in the language learning process as well. Language brokers were encouraged to translate for and contribute to the language benefits of their peers. However, due to language separation, the language brokers were not always accessible and easy to "tap into." Observations revealed that the language brokers were more likely to associate with other language brokers and were more likely to join the English monolingual groups instead of the Spanish monolingual groups. In one sense, these students assimilated into the dominant culture by speaking the language of the dominant language group. As Peña (1997) stated in his study, "success in school came more readily for those willing to understate, separate from or deny their Mexican culture" (p.13). The language brokers experienced the greatest success of all the students both academically and socially.

Theoretical Discussion on Asymmetry

According to Fairclough (1989), the sociopolitical context can be understood as the "dynamic interrelationships among situational, institutional, and societal levels that influence each other in important ways" (Freeman, 1996, p. 559). A crucial issue that needed to be examined was the socio-political context in which this program was implemented and operated. In other words, characteristics of the larger sociopolitical context greatly influenced the lack of equal opportunities observed.

In reference to my assertions concerning instructional asymmetry, it seems that bilingualism is not favored by a significant number of U.S. citizens. A culture that does not favor bilingualism may not encourage educators to cultivate bilingual students in

public schools. Ironically, the perceived advantage of being fluent in English may have enhanced communication between bilingual teachers and English-speaking students, encouraged these students to avoid mastering a language and culture other than their own, and introduced the concept that one language and culture was superior to another.

Furthermore, instructional asymmetries may have occurred because of a lack of bilingual teachers. The aforementioned instances of instructional asymmetry occurred as a result of the Spanish-speaking teachers' capacity to understand English. Hence, it would seem that an equal dispersion of bilingual teachers across classrooms would prevent these inequalities, but this is not plausible. If teachers with bilingual skills were equally available in the English-only and Spanish-only classrooms, only illusions of instructional symmetry would appear. It is true the teachers' language skills would be balanced across classrooms, but the potential for code-switching and language favoritism would now occur in both classrooms, doubling instructional errors. A trade-off would occur. The instructional errors would infringe upon the program's quality by promoting inadequate, instead of unequal, opportunities to learn. Ironically then, promoting equality would lead to inferior program quality. If teachers with bilingual skills were readily available in equal proportions, this program, and other dual-language programs for that matter, would become even more mediocre. It may be that monolingual Spanish and monolingual English teachers would facilitate an ideal match between instructional theory and program practices. In this scenario, the instructional asymmetries that emerged in this research would more likely vanish and the program's quality could be maintained. Developing a dual-language program with monolingual teachers, however, would likely introduce an array of other challenges.

In reference to my assertions regarding resource asymmetry, Spanish materials and resources were most difficult to obtain. Further, as Spanish is not seen as a primary language, this program suffered by not being able to provide monolingual resources in a balanced fashion. Resource constraints resulted in the Spanish language not being reinforced in the manner by which the programmatic guidelines and objectives articulated.

In reference to my assertions with respect to student segregation, this was an example at the school level of what happens in the larger social context. The Spanish language may not have clout or political sway in U.S. society. Although this program was developed to be a great "equalizer," this program served the needs of the English speakers and the bilingual students more often than the needs of those students who spoke Spanish only.

Research cited in Cummins (1986) supports the efficacy of dual language immersion programs if the native language has a high status and is strongly reinforced in the larger society (p. 20). In this study, asymmetry resulted in the English language being viewed with a higher status. English was perceived as more necessary and prevalent making the acquisition of a second and less esteemed language that much less desirable.

Conclusion

This study was important as it provided the opportunity to examine the relationship between dual language theory and practice in six dual language classroom settings. What transpired at Leigh holds meaning for how other schools conduct their dual language programs. Without an external view of the practices of such a program, such programs may subject students to inequality, to fewer educational opportunities, and

to policies and practices that separate students according to race, ethnicity, and language orientation. Furthermore, schools would continue to reproduce the inequalities and injustices that characterize the wider society thus making more failures inevitable (Cummins, 1986).

Although Leigh's program demonstrated discontinuities between theory and practice, Leigh's successes should also be recognized. The program, especially with respect to its infancy and sociopolitical context, was providing educational opportunities by offering bilingualism to its students. However, lacking greater symmetry and a more alert social conscious, the benefits of dual language in this and other programs may never be fully realized.

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